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"All of them, those in power, and those who want the power, would pamper us, if we agreed to overlook their crookedness by wilfully restricting our activities."
 — "Refus Global" , Paul-Émile Borduas

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TAGS: PREL [[External Political Relations](#)] , SCUL [[Cultural Affairs](#)] , SOCI [[Social Conditions](#)] , TPHY [[Physical Sciences](#)] , UNESCO [[UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization](#)]
 SUBJECT: U.S. OPPORTUNITIES AT UNESCO

¶1. (SBU) Summary: A [window](#) of opportunity has opened for the United States at UNESCO. With the election of Irina Bokova, the U.S. has a favorably disposed Director-General who is looking for new ideas. Rather than being on the defensive, the U.S. should be making programmatic proposals to help set the Organization's agenda.

While maintaining our long-standing support for literacy and management reform, the U.S. should broaden its efforts to other areas. Gender parity is one. UNESCO could do more to promote girls education, adult female literacy, the inclusion of women in scientific and engineering work, and action to protect women in conflict zones. Youth is another field for possible U.S. action. We could encourage UNESCO to broaden its existing partnerships with U.S. high tech firms to make greater use of social networking. We could also encourage UNESCO to promote the U.S. community college model and more practical post-secondary education focused on job-related skills. Inter-cultural understanding is another area of possible U.S. focus, one which could include existing U.S. efforts to work with UNESCO to foster Holocaust Education. Finally, in the field of culture, the U.S. might wish to consider an initiative to provide developing countries with capacity building [training and](#) help them preserve World Heritage sites.

¶2. (SBU) Summary Continued. All of this will take money. UNESCO will almost surely need contributions of U.S. extra-budgetary funds to accomplish these things, but it will need staff even more than money. The U.S. will thus need to consider innovative ways of providing personnel, whether through secondment, interns, or UNESCO's [associate](#) expert program. End Summary.

¶3. (SBU) The U.S. now has a unique opportunity to affect UNESCO's future course. Our successful efforts to influence the outcome of the Director-General selection at last September's Executive Board have demonstrated to other member states that the U.S. is a power to be reckoned with in this Organization, and in the person of new Director-General Irina Bokova, we have someone who is well disposed to the U.S. and who is clearly aware of how much she owes us. As of now Bokova is proceeding cautiously and consulting us frequently. She is focused on assembling her management team and has said relatively little about her programmatic priorities for the Organization other than that she would like to do more on science and on inter-cultural dialogue. This is, therefore, the moment for the U.S. to make clear to Bokova and to member states what we would like UNESCO to do.

Gender Across the Board

¶4. (SBU) Gender equality should be one of our key themes at UNESCO. UNESCO's Medium-Strategy already makes it a priority for the Organization which should be reflected in all its programs, and UNESCO already has a small office that focuses on this subject. We feel, however, that UNESCO could do much more in this area than it has been. Director-General Bokova is clearly interested. One of her very first appearances as Director-General-elect was at our roundtable with Ambassador Vermeer.

¶5. (SBU) There are many ways in which UNESCO could intensify action on gender issues and give them a higher profile. As UNESCO's first female Director-General, Ms. Bokova will enjoy an excellent bully pulpit to push the issue. We might consider encouraging her to appoint a gender advisory panel, conceivably with a seat set aside for Ambassador Vermeer. Depending on program funds, we might take the example of the UNESCO-L'Oreal science prizes for women researchers and explore establishing a smaller prize for women entrepreneurs, particularly in the developing South. UNESCO's Creative Industries division attempts to bring craftswomen's work to a larger audience; we could encourage U.S. companies to promote this initiative. We might also suggest that NGOs such as Vital Voices or Hunt Alternatives formalize partnerships with UNESCO.

¶6. (SBU) UNESCO's Education Sector could give greater attention to gender parity. We should press UNESCO to focus more on girls education and adult female literacy. We might seek passage of a draft decision at an Executive Board to this effect and work to include this issue more explicitly in the Organization's next program and budget. Some of our remaining UN Literacy Decade Funds could immediately be devoted to a program focused on literacy among adult women. We have already solicited a proposal from the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) that would concentrate on girls education in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

¶7. (SBU) Girls and science/engineering is another area on which UNESCO already does work that needs to be expanded. The L'Oreal prize for women in science has been a great success, but it needs follow up and expansion to other areas. Even in the United States, we suffer from a dearth of women in the sciences and engineering. UNESCO could seek to enlist other partnerships like L'Oreal which could create further initiatives aimed at popularizing women in these fields.

¶8. (SBU) Domestic violence and violence against women in conflict zones are other areas of possible UNESCO action. We understand that the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is seeking support in the African region for creation of a Category 2 institute that would focus on the problems of women in regions of conflict. After proper due diligence this is an initiative we might wish to

After proper due diligence, this is an initiative we might wish to support.

Youth

¶9. (SBU) Youth is another issue on which UNESCO could put more effort. Member states are interested. A senior Secretariat official told us recently that many governments have asked for help in this area. The June 2008 anti-radicalization conference (Youth at the Crossroads) in Bahrain which the U.S. funded was a success. Gulf Governments were interested in the issue as soon as they were reassured that we were not trying to criticize Islam. With a relatively small amount of unspent funds from the Bahrain Conference, UNESCO was able to fund another conference on this subject in Indonesia with Indonesian youth. Significantly, the Indonesian Government committed some of its own funds in support of the effort. With relatively small amounts of extra-budgetary funds, the U.S. could encourage other national or regional conferences on the topic. These meetings could be useful not only in focusing attention on the issue but also in helping to form a network among the NGO's working in this field. In our discussions with employees of these NGO's, we have learned that they are keen to exchange ideas on best practices and what works.

Community Colleges: Economic Access, Adult Education

¶10. (SBU) As part of our focus on youth, we could also encourage UNESCO to promote the community college model. Member states, particularly in Africa, are pressing UNESCO to do more about tertiary education. In addition to traditional four-year academic institutions, these countries need a flexible model for low-cost, post-secondary education that focuses wholeheartedly on equipping young and older adults with job-related skills. Our advocacy of further work in open educational resources (OERs) aligns with promoting the community college model, as well as in the larger realms of literacy and access to information.

Private-Public Partnerships

¶11. (SBU) One of the most intriguing areas for future UNESCO work is social networking. The Organization has been slow to make use of the full possibilities of the internet. It is waking up to them, however, and in Bokova we have a Director-General who is a generation younger and more interested in technology than her predecessor. UNESCO already has formed partnerships with many of the large technology firms (Microsoft, Apple, Hewlett-Packard, and Intel). Recently, UNESCO has launched content agreements with Google and its You Tube subsidiary; we will want to further institutionalize such partnerships with American companies as they both improve UNESCO's organizational capacity as well as raise its profile with our domestic public.

Social-Networking

¶12. (SBU) One particular area in which U.S. technology firms might be helpful is in the area of social networking. They might, for example, consider working with UNESCO to intelligently harness emerging social networking trends to create youth discussion fora, online intercultural dialogue sites or other networks.

Science

¶13. (SBU) The President in his Cairo speech suggested that science could be a bridge between the U.S. and the Islamic world. UNESCO could be an incubator for such cooperation. It already supports one project with such goals, the "Sesame" project which provides for regional cooperation (including Israel) on a synchrotron to be built in Jordan. Others could be devised, particularly, in the area of fresh water engineering. UNESCO has a robust program in this area and a network of Category 2 institutes (including one in the United States) which work in this area. We might also take advantage of the new Science Envoys program to engage with UNESCO field offices in key countries, as well as at headquarters.

Inter-Cultural Dialogue

¶14. (SBU) Bokova has made clear that she would like UNESCO to do more to improve cross-cultural understanding. Supporting this effort would be consistent with our efforts on behalf of women and youth and our work in science. In doing so, however, we will want to steer UNESCO away from hosting large conferences in which representatives (often clerics) from different religions debate each other while doing little to diminish the suspicions and fears that divide the world's publics. This is another area in which social networking techniques may provide a fresh approach. UNESCO's ASP-net which links schools across the globe might be helpful in this effort if it is given more resources.

¶15. (SBU) Another area in which the U.S. should press for action is on Holocaust Education. In 2007, the U.S. took the lead in pressing for adoption of a resolution tasking UNESCO with work in this area. Since then, UNESCO has produced some materials but has stopped due to resource constraints. We need to assist them to find resources to breathe new life into this effort. A good Holocaust Education program would be a useful component in a larger push for greater cross-cultural understanding.

World Heritage

¶16. (SBU) Many UNESCO member states place great importance on the Organization's cultural activities. The U.S. should not seem disinterested in this aspect of UNESCO's work. World Heritage is one area within Culture where the U.S. may wish to work. Developing states, particularly in Africa, raise the need for more training and capacity-building for their nationals at every World Heritage meeting. The U.S. - particularly the National Park Service -- has extensive expertise in this area. We should develop a capacity-building initiative for developing countries. If significant funding can be located, the U.S. might even wish to launch a category 2 institute aimed providing conservation training to those countries in need of it.

Personnel

¶17. (SBU) As we move forward with those of these ideas that Washington may approve, we will need to keep in mind that UNESCO often lacks sufficient, trained personnel to implement the projects it wants to undertake. Its personnel shortages are even more acute than its financial limitations. If we want important projects done quickly and according to our wishes, we will in many instances have to help provide UNESCO the manpower to do them. We will thus need to consider concluding an agreement with UNESCO to provide Associate Experts, who can be compensated out of our extra-budgetary funds. (Italy, UNESCO's largest donor of extra-budgetary funds, for example, makes extensive use of this mechanism to place Italians in positions of strategic importance to Italy.) We will also wish to make use of existing mechanisms to second staff to the Secretariat and to place Fullbright fellows or interns in offices involved in implementing our programs.

Management Reform

¶18. Finally, while we work creatively on the program side, we will also need to continue our longstanding efforts for management reform. Well thought out management improvements would improve UNESCO's ability to deliver programs. As a former ambassador to UNESCO, Bokova is well aware of the desire of most member states for improved management. We will thus also be pushing on an open door in this area.

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